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# SIKHISM

## AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

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## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

Man has been described as a 'social animal'. Aristotle and Bacon agree that, notwithstanding his individual impulses to kill and compete, sociability is in the very blood of Man, because society had existed long before him. In the lower stages of animal life too, social organization has been developed, as in ants and bees, to a point of co-operation superior even to any seen in the human race.<sup>1</sup> "The Hamadrays baboons," says Darwin, "turn over stones to find insects, and when they come to a larger one, as many as can stand round it, turn it over together and share the booty.....Similarly bull bisons, when there is danger, drive the cows and calves into the middle of the herd, while they defend the outside."<sup>2</sup> "The gradual formation of social instinct," according to him, "has been developed by the young remaining a long time with their parents."<sup>3</sup> In this very context, in an answer to Rousseau, Burke is reported to have said, "Society is not a contract between contemporaries; it is an unconscious and gradual formation, and if, at all, there is a contract involved it is one between the past, the present and the future"<sup>4</sup>.

Thus, whatever be its basis, there is no denying the fact, that, based upon social affinity, some form of social structure has ever been the most fundamental institution of humanity, and, "there hardly lives a brute with soul so dead that is not thrilled, at times with a sense of physical solidarity with Mankind."<sup>5</sup>

Paradoxically enough, however, notwithstanding society being an integral and essential part of human existence, religious traditions of almost every Faith, except

1. Will Durant : Pleasures of Philosophy, P. 91.
2. Darwin : The Descent of Man, P. 114.
3. Ibid P. 119,
4. Reflections on French Revolution, P. 91.
5. Will Durant : Pleasures of Philosophy, P. 281.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

Sikhism and to a lesser extent, Judaism & Islam have been enchanted with the concept of abdication or renunciation of Society as a higher form of spiritual effort and even as means to spiritual elevation and ultimate emancipation. Extreme forms of Hindu asceticism, Gnosticism of Egypt and Syria, Neoplatonic traditions of the later Greeks, ascetic examples of Christian monks and some orders of Muslim mysticism are all inspired-albeit with varying degrees of emphasis-by the same Ideal, namely, deliberate detachment from all mundane efforts and social association, and obligations.

The common denominator in these traditions is the thought that "the material body is inherently evil and spiritual element alone is good". The object of ascetic exercise is, therefore, "the ultimate extinction of body so that the soul may be free"<sup>6</sup> "This is a metaphysical dualism which separates soul and body, God and the world, spiritual and material into sharply contrasted realities and life is looked at more or less as the struggle for supremacy and the ultimate victory of Spirit by the extinction of the material and lower elements."<sup>7</sup> The degree of this metaphysical dualism vary from 'the sharp emphasis on the negative work of destroying the body so that the soul may be free from its desires'<sup>8</sup> to the positive emphasis upon the 'union of soul with God by abstraction, Contemplation and faith as in pietism.'<sup>9</sup>

In sematic religious tradition, the damnation of the human body is traced to the original sin committed by the first parents of Mankind, Adam and Eve. Since we are all children of Adam, Augustine argued, we share his guilt, are indeed the off springs of his guilt. 'Eating the apple,

6. Plato's *Timaeus* P. 69-71.

7. *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* II, P. 64.

8. Max-Mullar on *Ninwana: Chips from a German Workshop* Vol I (P. 276-287)

9. *Ritschl's Geschichte des Pietismus* Vol I, P. 60

brought not only natural death, but eternal death i.e. damnation, because as a result of the Sin, Man that, might have been spiritual in body became carnal in mind.<sup>10</sup>

In Eastern religions, more particularly Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, such an approach is rooted in the hide bound theories of 'Karma' and 'Transmigration of Soul', the only possible escape from which is the gradual closure of individual account in the 'Divine Court' by incapacitation and even extinction of the body to do any action, good or bad, and thus gradually striking a zero balance. As such, the highest good of the ancient Indian philosophies is to get rid of the fetters of action - and consequent rebirth-by overcoming the inclination to be active. They aim at the total extinction of the individual volition.<sup>11</sup>

As a matter of fact, the rise and growth of ascetic practices and monastic orders is generally traced to the ancient Indian traditions which go as far back as the upnishdic or even the Rig vedic period. For example, Rig veda speaks of, 'Indra having conquered heaven by asceticism'.<sup>12</sup> According to Will Durant 'possibly Ashoka's missionaries (250 Bc.) had brought the monastic form to the Near East and pre-Christian anchorities like those of Serapis of Egypt may have transmitted the same to St. Anthony, the first of the hermits who was born in Egypt in about 250 A.D. and who withdrew from the world about 270 A.D.<sup>13</sup> For fifteen years he lived alone in a hut near his home and then for 20 years in a remote solitude in the desert. He practiced extreme austerities, reducing food drink and sleep to the minimum required to support life. By the end of his life, Thebaid (the desert near Egyptian Thebes) was full of hermits who had been inspired by his example and precepts.<sup>14</sup>

10. Bertrand Russell: Western Philosophical Thought P. 357

11. Encyclopaedia of Religions & Ethics II, P. 493.

12. Rig Veda X 86-2.

13. Story of Civilization part IV, P. 58.

14. Bertrend Russell: Western Philosophical Thought P. 372.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

However, according to another school of thought the beginning of early Christian asceticism and monasticism goes back to essentially the influence of the later Greek and Judaeo-Hellenic schools of philosophy. The religions of East, according to it, can at best be credited with only an indirect influence namely the syncretism of Alexandrian epoch.

The extent to which the concept of asceticism had impinged upon the Christian doctrines can be gauged from the fact this that in early Church and even in deep middle ages 'cleanliness was viewed with abhorrence. Lice were called 'pearls of God' and were a mark of saintliness. Saints would boast that water had never even touched them'.<sup>15</sup> And the disdain with which all worldly activities were looked down upon is apparent from some of the letters of Gregory, the Great Pope of the seventh century. One of his letters to the bishop of Cagliari in Sardinia Says: 'It has been told me that on the Lord's day, before celebrating the solemnities of mass thou wentest forth to plough up the crop.....Seeing that we still spare thy grey hair, bethink thee at length, old man, and restrain thyself from such levity of behaviour and perversity of deeds'.....<sup>16</sup>

Although the Protestant Church rejects the hyper-asceticism of middle ages, yet, a number of wonted asectic observances, like keeping weekly and yearly fasts did pass over into the practices of Lutherans, Anglicans and some other reformed Churches. The continental Pietists, the Methodists of England and the Presbyteriens of North America evince in general a tendency to withdrawal from the world.

Notwithstanding the ascetic nature of some of the Islamic religious obligations like fasting during Ramzan,

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15. Ibid P. 372.

16. Ibid P 378.

ascetism as such is not sanctioned by Islam and its Founder, according to whom *Rahbaniya* (monasticism) was no part of Islam.<sup>17</sup> And yet curiously enough, several instances of persons contemporary with Mohammad are available who did penance for their sins. For example, Bahlul retired into mountains in the neighbourhood of Medina, clad himself in hard cloth and tied his hands behind his back with iron chains, crying repeatedly :

‘O my God, see Bahlul bound and shackled  
confessing his sins’<sup>18</sup>

Probably the intense terror produced by the vivid description in the Quran on the day of Judgement and the morbid consciousness of sin encouraged the growth of asceticism during *Umayyad period* (661-750 A.D.). Many stories are told of persons who died of fear on hearing a preacher describe the anguish that awaits the wicked after the resurrection and, of those who wept so violently from terror and remorse that they swooned away. Kahmab-al-Hassan is said to have wept for forty years because he had once taken a piece of clay from a neighbour’s wall.<sup>19</sup> There was a class of such ascetics, called ‘weepers’. Subsequently, notwithstanding the Quranic sanctions against the concept of asceticism, there has been growth of many monastic orders in Islam, like Adawis, Qadiris. Rafiais, Melevis etc. An order of Muslim ascetics founded in 18th century is known as RASUL SHAHIS, whose adherents shave completely the head, moustaches and the eyebrows.<sup>20</sup>

However, in no other religion asseticism has been so widely practiced as in Hinduism. The injunctions of their sacred books and the examples of their sages, have helped to ingrain in the mind of its votaries the thought that renunciation of the world, with rejection of its

17. Quran ivil, 27.

18. Encyclopedia of Religions & Ethics, vol. II P. 100,

19. Ibid P. 100

20 Punjab Tribes and Casts III 324.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

pleasures and pursuits is the supreme good. This other-worldly or rather anti-worldly approach is predominantly found in every school of Indian religious thought. Beginning with Rig-Veda, it became an article of faith by the time of the upnishdas when the twin doctrines of karma and transmigration were first propounded. These doctrines have cast their shadows on almost all Indian religions, in some form or the other.

The extent to which the concept of ascetism as a mean of salvation has ruled the socio-religious sentiments of the people in Indian has been beautifully described by the famous Philosopher from France, Voltaire in a little story called 'Bababee'. In it Omni asks the Brahmin if there is any chance of his eventually reaching the nineteenth heaven.

"It depends, 'replied the Brahmin, 'On what kind of life you lead'

"I try to be a good citizen, a good husband, a good father, a good friend, I sometimes lend money without interest to the rich, I give to the poor, I preserve peace among my neighbours."

"But," asked the Brahmin, 'do you occasionally stick nails into your behind'?

"Never, reverend father."

"I am soory", the Brahmin replied, "You will certainly not attain to the nineteenth heaven."<sup>21</sup>

The climax of this approach was reached in the Prayag traditions originating in Mahabharata and the Puranas, according to which sacrifice at Prayag is of supreme religious merit. They also prescribe five terrible methods of suicide namely drowning, destruction by slow burning fire, scorching by fire from below with head suspended downward; feeding slices of flesh to the birds and

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21. In Noyes, Voltaire 556.

fasting unto death, References to such types of 'sacred suicide' at Paryag date back to 4th century A.D. and the practice persisted upto the beginning of the 18th century when it was strigently stopped by the British.

While Nietzsche accuses such forms of asceticism as 'holy form of debauchery,' the most celebrated historian of the present age, Arnold Toynbee describes them as schism in the soul of an individual which according to him 'has been responsible for the decline and fall of many a society.'

The other extreme with similar results, according to him, is held by the advocates of the theory of wild 'Abandon' which sanctions free and full satisfaction of all natural passions as a way to individual excellence.<sup>22</sup> While in the west the source of inspiration of this school of thought is rooted in the Bacchus cult (Dionysus) of Greek and Roman mythology, its counterpart in the East is represented by SAKTI 'whose slender waist bending beneath the burden of the ripe fruits of her breasts swells into jewelled hips heavy with the promise of infinite maternities,' embodying female principle Yomi, and SIVA, the male principle Semen. They are the two polar principles revolving around sex. According to some of their traditions 'union with God can be obtained only through sex'<sup>23</sup> and 'perfection can be gained by satisfying all one's desires; one may eat any kind of meat, including human flesh, may lie, may steal and commit adultery.'<sup>24</sup>

The havoc the adherents of these traditions can wrought to any society of human beings is not difficult to assess. Return to the nature call of Jean-Jecques Rousseau is currently manifesting itself in what Arnold Toynbee

22. Arnold Toynlee: A study of history P. 161-243;

23. Kutarnava Tantra, viii, 107.

24. Gubyasamerja Tantra.



## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

calls 'drug culture' 'which threatens to compose itself into a dangerous reduction ad-absurdum of the principle of relativity on the social and political plane undermining the apparently valid concept that, an irreducible minimum of fixed poles of orientation is a necessary element in the psychological health of both individuals and societies.'<sup>25</sup>

Sikhism, as founded by Guru Nanak Dev, in the fifteenth Century not only steers clear of both these extremes namely of 'wild abandon' and 'hyper-asceticism,' but also firmly denounces them as erratic and egoistic behaviour unworthy of social and spiritual health. According to the holy Prophet. 'Practicing self-torture to subdue desires only wears off the body. The mind is not subdued through fasting and penances,' and as such 'he who tortures the body to wither away is not approved.'<sup>26</sup>

Stressing further the barren-ness of the escapist approach of the ascetics, Sri Guru Nanak Dev Says in another of his hymns :

Yoga (True Religion) is neither in a patched coat  
nor in the Yogi's staff, nor in besmearing one  
with ashes.  
Nor in wearing ear-rings, nor in close-cropping  
of the head; nor in blowing the horn;  
Lead a pious life among the impurities of the world,  
thus shalt thou find access to true religion.  
True religion (Yoga) does not consist in mere words,  
True yogi is he who looked upon all creation alike  
Yoga does not consist in living in cemeteries, or  
in places of cremation; nor in sitting in  
particular postures of contemplation.  
Yoga does not consist in roaming in far fetched  
lands; nor in bathing at places of pilgrimage;

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25. Arnold Toynbee: A study of history P. 243;

26. Adi Granth P. 236 Gauroi M. 1.

If one remaineth detached in the midst of attachments, then verily one attaineth the true state of yoga.<sup>27</sup>

Sheikh Farid, a muslim divine, whose holy hymns have been incorporated in the Sikh Scriptures tenders a similar advice to the recluse. Says has to them :

“Scorch not thy body like an ovan,  
Burn not thy bones like Firewood,  
What harm have thy head and feet done thee ?

Similarly in a scathing criticism of such practices Nanak IV, Sri Guru Ram Dass says :

“As the teats on a goat’s neck yield no milk,  
so yoga without piety yields no advantage. My Sikhs are family men and may obtain salvation in that condition of life. It would be impossible for them to practise your system of yoga. The best mean of yoga is the repetition of the holy Name. Without love and devotion to God, all other means of obtaining salvation are unprofitable :<sup>28</sup>

Guru Nanak’s refusal to nominate his eldest son, Sri Chand, as his successor because of his other-worldliness barred the door to renunciation in Sikhism. The succeeding Gurus jammed it further by reiterating the futility of a life of a recluse and by investing the spiritually-oriented householders with hitherto unknown dignity and grace through a process of washing from their face the filth of social evils like caste callousness, corruption, illiteracy, infanticide and sati etc as also by inculcating in them the courage to combat evil and injustice through personal precepts of the highest order.

27. Adi Granth P. 731. Suhi Mohalla I

28. Mecaulliffe, The Sikhs Religion II. P. 274.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

If renunciation as a way of life is not approved in Sikhism, a life lost in baser passions is equally denounced because both of them are deleterious to the growth of social health. The one is barren, the other is base. These passions have been identified as Sensuality Anger, Covetousness, Excessive attachment to things mundane and Ego. They have come in for very severe criticism in the holy Sikh scriptures. In one of the holy humns, Guru Nanak Says:

“Covetousness is a dog, falsehood a sweeper,  
food obtained by deceit carrion;  
Slander of others is merely others ‘filth in  
our mouths; the fire of Anger is a sweeper”.

In another such hymn the Prophet exhorts the people to rise above these low passions if they wish to be accepted in the Lord’s court.

“Put away from you, Lust, wrath and Slander.  
Abandon avrice, and covetousness and you shall  
be free from care.”<sup>29</sup>

The following hymn of Guru Gobind Singh while being a most categorical statement of Sikhism on the issues of asceticism and surrender to baser passions also lays down the broad framework of the ethical standards which its votaries are enjoined to adhere to.

O’man practise asceticism in this way.  
Consider thy house altogether as the forest,  
and remain an anchorite at heart.  
Make continence thy matted hair, union with  
God thy abolutions, thy daily religious  
duties, the growth of thy nails,  
Divine knowledge thy spiritual guide.

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29. Maru Solhe.

Admonish thy heart and apply God's name as ashes  
to thy body.

Eat little, sleep little, have love, mercy and  
forbearance.

Ever practice mildness and patience and thou  
shalt be freed from the three 'qualities,

Attach not to thy heart lust, wrath,  
covetousness, obstinacy and love for world.

Thus shalt thou behold the real soul  
of this world and attain to the Supreme Being.

As is evident, therefore, Sikhism is poles apart from  
both these extremities rooted in a malignant approach  
towards life involving abdication of social responsibilities.  
For one it is an opportunity to seek self aggrandisement  
while for the other the world is unworthy of any reconcilia-  
tion being 'Evil' and a 'Vale of sin and sorrow'.

Sikhism strongly refutes these theories. For it, the  
world is a 'theatre for righteous action' and a manifestation  
of the Holy Spirit of the Lord God.

'Holy are the continents created by Thee.

Holy Thy universe

Holy the World and the forms therein

Holy are Thy doing and all that is in Thy mind.<sup>30</sup>

The human body similarly is not regarded as a pro-  
jection of the original Sin, but is accepted as a mansion  
of God.

This beautiful mansion, the body,

Is the temple of God.

In which he has instilled

His light Infinite.

Thus, in Sikhism, the basic postulates of human  
existence stand on a different plane. Life is not a punish-

30. Var Asa Mohalla 1.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

ment but a rare opportunity to attain to the highest spiritual elevation and the social organization is the necessary context in which the way to such an elevation has to be sought. The Sikh way of life, therefore, is firmly grounded in society with no social activity beyond its scope, not even political. In this religion 'man is the source of spirituality, society is the centre of moral actions and God is the end of all religious efforts. The object of Sikhism, as a way of life is to create a spiritual kinship and unity between man and man, between man and God, and between man and Society.'<sup>31</sup>

For a fuller appreciation of these Ideals as basis for the socio-spiritual regeneration a passing reference to the socio-political conditions obtaining in India at the time of the advent of Sikhism would be imperative.

A greater portion of India then had been under the Muslim rule for the last five centuries. Most of the Muslim rulers were excessively intolerant and fanatical. They tyrannized over the people, especially the non-muslims, who were not allowed to pursue their religion or even to eat well or dress well. As pointed out by Prof. Toynbee 'Islam impinged upon Hinduism violently, and on the whole the story of the relations between the two great religions on Indian ground has been an unhappy tale of mutual misunderstanding and hostility.'<sup>32</sup> The sense of belonging to the ruling class with a mistaken belief in a divine mission to exterminate the infidels and their culture had generated feelings of such arrogance among the Muslims towards their Hindu compatriots that 'either the very right of existence was being denied to them or if they were allowed to exist they were considered as means towards their selfish ends'.<sup>33</sup>

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31. Social Philosophy of Guru Gobind Singh By. Dr. Tirlochan Singh

32. Sacred writings of the Sikhs P. 10 Unesco Publication.

33. Dr. Sher Singh: Philosophy of Sikhism P. 20.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

The social picture presented by the Muslims was by no means enviable. Drunk with power their rulers were sunk in a life of depravity and debauchery. Their hunger for riches was insatiable and forcible exactions from the people turned them into 'Man-eaters' and their officials into 'dogs who licked blood of the people and ate their flesh.'<sup>34</sup> Their own priestly class, the Mullahs, were no better than the Hindu Brahmins. Instead of ministering to the spiritual needs of the people they were thriving on corruption and mal-practices. The few saints in their ranks were imitating the Hindus in withdrawing from the society. The plight of the women among Muslims was rather sad. They were looked upon as playthings for their lust; their intense mistrust at the hands of males made them no better than prisoners in their homes with a black veil over their face. Infanticide, strictly forbidden by Quran became quite common among them too and it is even said that the practice of Satti was not unknown among them in the days of Jahangir.<sup>35</sup> Besides, prostitution was very widely practiced.

The Hindus were divided into four varnas which again were sub-divided into a long range of Jattis. They were generally ignorant and indifferent to the realities of life. Armed with the monopolistic right to recite the mantras and perform the religious rites, their priestly class the Brahmins, were very selfish. The people and the priests both were lost in meaningless rites and superstitions and in order to gain petty favours at the hands of the Muslim rulers, freely imitated their way of life. Exposing their hypocritical ways Guru Nanak says about them :

You wear a lion cloth, sacrificial marks and a  
rosary,

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34. Adi Granth P. 1287.

35. Ducan Greenless: Gospel of Guru Granth P. xxii.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

Yet you earn your living from those whom you call  
malechhas.

You perform Hindu worship in private  
Yet, O my brothers, you read the books of the  
Mahammadans and adopt their manners.

(Asa-di-Var)

The condition of the so-called lower classes was still worse among Hindus. As the Muslims treated them, so the upper classes, in turn treated the 'sudras' and untouchables; 'they had no swords or the right to slay or kill, but they murdered them with hatred, contempt and social exclusion'.<sup>36</sup> Even a saint like Tulsidas referred to sudras as 'men whom even the highest virtues could not raise'. One half of even the higher castes were also held down by contempt and dislike, woman were considered to be unworthy of attaining salvation or entering heaven until they had been reborn as men; they were considered to be sensual, and spoilers of man's spiritual life. Seekers of spirituality turned away from them and wandered in forests aimlessly.

Such schism of a society alonglines of class, according to Arnold Toynbee is distinctive mark of the phases of its break down and disintegration.<sup>37</sup> And, as if to hasten the process of disintegration, Babar descended on the plains of Punjab and sweeping Hindus and Muslim Afghans alike before him reached Delhi to forcibly woo the throne of Hindustan. The wide spread misery and havoc caused by his hordes silenced even the bravest but not Guru Nanak who denounced him for his act of oppression and chided the people for their slavish acceptance of the oppression telling them that :

'If we live without self-respect,  
All that we eat is undeserved.'

36. Duncan Greenless: *Gospel of Guru Granth* P. xix.

37. Arnold Toyanbeen: *The study of History* P. 223.

For his acts of aggression, Guru Nanak condemned Babar right at his face and warned him that if he did not stop oppressing the people, he is bound to go down. No religious leader before Guru Nanak had ever risked his skin on behalf of the people like this. His ideals and dispensations smacked of revolution and this is what he aimed at. He had decided to give to the people a religion of revolution 'which would not be of the kind that justified things as they were but rather of the kind that put down the tyrant from his seat and raised up the humble and the meek and would really change civilization and society in the only way they could be permanently changed-by changing the picture in man's mind and by revolutionizing his thought and wills.<sup>38</sup>

For such a purpose, the people had to be freed of all those bonds which were holding them down in a state of perpetual bondage by the kings and the clergy who had connived to forge certain metaphysical theories to their advantage. For example Mannu had ordained that 'He, the resplendent, for the sake of protecting all the creatures, assigned separate duties to those born of His mouth, arms, thighs and feet. Teaching and studying the vedas, performing sacrifices and assisting others in doing so, making gifts and receiving gifts; these he assigned to the Brahmins. The protection of the people, gifts, performing of sacrifices and studying of Vedas, non-attachment to sensual pleasures; these he prescribed for kashatriyas. The protection of cattle, gifts, sacrificing and study of vedas, trade, banking and agriculture, to the Vaisyas; God allotted only one duty to sudras, to serve without demand the members of all the classes mentioned above.'<sup>39</sup>

38. Dr. Sher Singh Philosophy of Sikhism P. 20.

39. S. Kapur Singh Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh P. 393



## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

Endorsing this theory, Tulsidas in his *Ram Charit Manas* says. 'A Brahmin must be honoured though devoid of every virtue and merit; but a sudra never, though distinguished for every virtue and learning.' 'Mannu gives the same privileged position to the ruling class as well by prescribing in his book of Law that 'even an infant king should not be despised for he was a great god in human form and he should be rendered implicit submission and ungrudging service', indicating thereby a sort of unholy alliance between the two upper classes to perpetuate their hold on the people. Though not in these terms but Gita too asserts that 'man qua man must act in the frame work of his prakritic nature alone'.<sup>40</sup> And, what is amazing is that even in modern times this type of stratification of society has been defended by such eminent persons as Dr. Radha Krishnan,<sup>41</sup> No wonder, Nietzsche the noted German philosopher describes Manu's dispensations as 'holy lies to secure Brahminic tyranny and exploitation of the people'. The Sikh scriptures denounce them in no different terms.

Now, for a fundamental metamorphosis in the thoughts and wills of Man, it was imperative to demolish these theories forged in the name of God. Sri Guru Nanak Dev did so by telling the people that all of them high or low, have got the same rights to socio-spiritual treasures because they all are heir to the same Divine Spirit. The holy words of Nanak V, 'EK PITTA EKES KE HAM BARAK' i.e. 'the Lord God is our eternal Father and we all are his children', though seemingly innocent, were the pronouncement of a new age and a new society in which there is no room for exploitation of man by man and in which men and women alike, can have access to any field of activity including the reading and teaching of Scriptures

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40. Gita 14, 56.

41. Radha Krishnan, *Eastern Religions and Thoughts* P. 357.

as also to the sanctum sanctorium of any of their holy places.

The idea of unicity of God was not unknown or unsung before the advent of Guru Nanak, but, the real rub came in when he preached the 'brotherhood of man.' Recognizing the true import of these words Cunningham opines that, 'it was reserved for Nanak to perceive the true principles of reform and to lay those broad foundations which enabled his successor (Guru) Gobind (Singh) to fire the minds of his countrymen with a new nationality and to give practical effect to the doctrine that the lowest is equal with the highest, in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes.'<sup>42</sup>

By the unreserved and unequivocal condemnation of the contemporary wayward rulers and their priestly classes as 'Dogs' and 'Butchers,' the Guru demolished the theory of their so-called 'Divine right' and made them answerable to the people, the meanest of whom could now aspire for the highest of office, on the strength of his merits.

He alone should sit on the throne  
who is fit to rule,<sup>43</sup>

said the Guru enjoining further that 'the outstanding trait in a ruler should be reverence and fear of the will of the assembly of the elect'<sup>44</sup> besides dedication to impartial Justice'.<sup>45</sup> And, as a reiteration of the principle of equality Guru Gobind Singh, says in one of his writings that 'A king must apply the same laws to himself as he does to others.'

These, then, in a broad sense, are the fundamental postulates of the society envisaged in Sikhism, By laying the

42. Cunningham: History of the Sikhs P. 34

43. Adi Granth P. 1039.

44. Adi Granth P. 992.

45. Adi Granth, Var Sarang M. 1.

## SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

foundation of Pangat (Community Kitchen) and Sangat (Community prayer), Guru Nanak took practical steps to bring down the commensal barriers of Hinduism and these efforts strengthened and expanded by the succeeding Gurus, helped to build up 'a Community that was far more homogeneous, unified and integrated than the vertically graded and sharply stratified Jati Hindus. The common appellation given to its members by Guru Gobind Singh immensely strengthened the sense of unity and enabled them to share common objectives, adversity and suffering as also success and failure.'<sup>46</sup>

The three basic tenets laid down in Sikhism for the health, happiness and growth of such a society both at individual and corporate levels are :

1. NAM JAPO, practice the discipline of the Name,
2. KIRT KARO, Engage in honest non-exploitive Labour,
3. VAND CHHAKO, Share your earnings with others.

'The first tenet inculcates the necessity for spiritual 'Sadhana' for the purpose of purifying and uplifting the individual soul to the full realisation of its true essence by meditating on God, the second enjoins honest labour and as a corollary forbids all wealth and material possessions not acquired through honest and non-exploitive labour, and according to the third the whole Community is morally entitled to the fruits of such labour, not, indeed on grounds of equity or economic justice, which are amorphous and relative concepts, but, on the ground, that no individual is spiritually complete unless he considers himself as part of the society as a whole.'<sup>47</sup>

46. Nirajan Ray *The Sikh Gurus & the Sikh Society* P. 34.

47. S Kapur Singh, *Guru Nanak and a Note on JAPU*, a commemorative Lecture given in 1975.

Naturally enough, therefore, the concept of social service as a means to spiritual elevation is repeatedly emphasised in Sikhism, so much so that it is enjoined to be *sine-qua-non* for access to Divine grace :

‘He alone would earn the Divine grace who engages himself in the service of the people,<sup>48</sup>

says Guru Nanak and Bhai Gurdas the Sikh Savaat, reiterates the same in his ‘Vars’.

‘Cursed are one’s hands and feet without service and in the absence thereof.

All other religious deeds are of no avail.’

In this connection a tradition connected with Guru Ram Dass is very telling. According to it once when three Sikhs, Bishan Das, Manak Chand and Puru begged the Guru to give them instructions for their own salvation and that of their families, the Guru bade them serve the people and induce their relations to do likewise.<sup>49</sup>

To bring home the true import of the Sikhs’ concept of social service, it needs to be stressed that, unlike in Quran and fundamentalist form of Christianity persons not conforming to the Sikh tenets are not excluded from the benefits of such a service. And, above all, the divine reward that is promised to the Sikhs for their social service is not in the form of a ‘paradise of one vast garden with rivers of milk, honey and wine, where virgins with swelling bosoms and modest gaze would be at their beck and call’.<sup>50</sup> The Sikhs, by serving the people, deem to serve the Lord at

48. Guru Nanak: *Adi Granth P.*

49. Macauliffe II. P. 274.

50. Quran: LV 56-8 *ixxviii* 33 *xxxvii*, 48, as quoted in story of civilization by with Durant, P. 179.

#### SIKHISM AND SOCIAL UPLIFT

whose feet they seek just a little corner. 'My Sikhs desire not heaven,' said Guru Ram Dass to Tappa, 'Heaven they deem not fit reward for their merits. Their minds are ever absorbed in God's love. That is their heaven and salvation.'<sup>51</sup>

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51. Shri Guru Granth Kosh, Khalsa Tract, Society, 1927.